

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

URGENT INFORMATION

(Before Tuesday's WSAG)

January 17, 1974

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY KISSINGER

FROM:

W.R. Smyser

SUBJECT:

Updating Estimate Regarding a North Vietnamese Offensive

I see no reason before this WSAG to alter the estimate I gave you three months ago that the North Vietnamese plan to launch a major military effort in South Vietnam this dry season.

Hanoi's Basic Problem. This assessment is not based on the vacillating intelligence estimates regarding North Vietnamese infiltration (below), but on Hanoi's basic political dilemma:

-- Time is working against the North Vietnamese in South Vietnam, no matter how many roads they build or tanks they send. The Politburo must now realize that when it made the settlement with you it repeated the mistake it had made in 1945, 1954, and 1968, of underestimating the tenacity of the Southern and Central Vietnamese political forces ruling in Saigon.

-- In the past, Hanoi has always tried to reverse declining trends by strong military measures. There is no reason to expect a change in this, unless Hanoi has decided (1) to give up on South Vietnam or (2) to trust the political path. Hanoi's actions since the ceasefire have shown no such decisions, despite its desire for American aid.

Infiltration Rates. Infiltration started strongly in November, tailed off somewhat in mid-December, and is now proceeding at a level that will give Hanoi all the forces it needs for a major push. Moreover, North Vietnamese logistics facilities are now so good that our old perceptions of infiltration timetables must be changed.

What Is a Major Offensive? All intelligence analysts are arguing this question, skewing their definitions to suit their estimates. By my definition, it means a high level of military initiative, sustained over some length of time and occurring at a number of places. It need not mean a re-run of 1968 or 1972, but it can still be pretty rough.

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